

LBJ AND HIS CRITICS

BY RAYMOND MOLEY



President Johnson's strong actions in Vietnam and in the Dominican Republic deserve the understanding and support of every American who cherishes his country's traditions and faces the hard facts of the present-day world. Most of the President's critics either ignore or do not know the realities of international life, or choose to risk our security and that of other free nations in the pursuit of only an illusion of peace.

There are others who have recognized the necessity of these operations, but carp at the President in matters of method and detail. I have noted three lines of criticism:

One is that in these two interventions the President has set a pattern for intervention in every spot where internal trouble arises in every area—Eurasia, Africa and Latin America. But what has been called the Johnson Doctrine is not a policy of general containment around the whole perimeter of the Communist world, nor is it a promise that we will intervene whenever in any nation Communist elements threaten to take over. It differs essentially from what was called the Dulles policy of "brinkmanship." These two interventions have a meaning deeply rooted in traditional American as well as British foreign policy. They must be considered against the background of a common purpose, which is to keep free the great highways of international communication by sea.

PRIORITY FOR ACTION

Another criticism, which concerns method, was especially directed at the American operation in Santo Domingo. In Vietnam we are bound by a firm commitment, as well as by our responsibility as the strongest nation in the free world. In the Dominican case, we were confronted by a clear and immediate danger. The situation could not be permitted to develop while we enjoyed the luxury of debate in the U.N. or the OAS. Those who say that before our forces landed we should have carefully determined which of various factions we preferred to support, ignore the chaos which prevailed at that time. The very fact that chaos prevailed was the most important reason why we should have acted. The sorting

out of the good from the bad in such a situation becomes a task which follows rather than precedes the introduction of powerful forces by the nation best suited to provide them and which has the most vital interests at stake.

Another gripe is that there were only a "few" Communists involved in the fighting. It was irrelevant whether there were 60 or 600 Communists involved. What was and is relevant is to make sure that no government takes over on that island which will be hospitable to a Castro infusion or which will permit the expansion of Soviet strength in the Caribbean. Such a Communist takeover would be intolerable, as the President as well as his predecessor made clear on many occasions.

FREE THE SEA LANES

In Santo Domingo and in Vietnam the question is not so much what they are as where they are. Their strategic position brings under consideration the essential interests of the United States as well as the other nations of the free world. The fact that President Johnson has been subjected to criticism in Britain and France does not alter the fact that both these nations have an indispensable interest in keeping the waters between the Western continents free. The free world demands that there be freedom of passage through and over what an American Secretary of State in 1858 called "the gates of intercourse of the great highways of the world." And as Secretary Cass then and as President Theodore Roosevelt said nearly half a century later, when such gates are under the control of small and weak nations, the question of sovereignty must be subordinated to international necessity.

The Caribbean and the Gulf of Mexico constitute such a highway, and Panama is such a gateway, just as the Mediterranean, Gibraltar and Suez have been in the past.

A similar strategic situation prevails in Southeast Asia, where the Strait of Malacca and other avenues through the East Indies are vital to world intercourse. It is the larger strategy which makes the two operations so significant and which so amply justifies Mr. Johnson's actions.